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CLIMBING RANKED AS A SUPPORT PLAYER – A GUIDE BY @dasTurbo

Often, when looking for advice on how to gain MMR and climb the ranked ladder in Dota 2, I see the following advice:

- Play high impact roles, like carry, mid, or even offlane.
- Randoms can't be trusted to play carry or mid, you should take a strong hero and win your lane, then win the game.
- More farm = more impact on the game's outcome.

I followed this train of thought for most of my time playing DotA, but I never really improved much as a player in that time. I have even been playing in in-house leagues such as IXDL-O, EatSleepPlay, and the Amateur Dota 2 League for over a year now and didn't see much improvement until recently, when I started playing the support role more frequently in both pubs and private games. Here's why I think the "play core" mentality could be the wrong method for getting better at Dota and raising your MMR as a result.

- Some of us just prefer to play support. For whatever, crazy reason, we choose to be the ward bitch for our team, who often gets blamed for losses due to whatever crazy reason.
- Playing core roles can give you tunnel vision. I know that often I am sometimes purely focused on increasing my farm and GPM while neglecting other aspects of the game, like showing up to teamfights or claiming objectives.
- Core roles promote a selfish play style, in my opinion. It's all about increasing *your* GPM, efficiency, and impact. As a result, you might be blind to how you are negatively impacting your team.

So what benefits are there to playing support more frequently?

1. Forces you to think long term when it comes to objectives, and the strengths or weaknesses of any lineup.
2. More emphasis on helping your teammates succeed – not being selfish.
3. Encourages players to do more with less of everything – experience, gold, items, etc.

4. Positioning is often more important as a support than it is as a core player because you can be burst down easily before getting any key spells off.
5. No one else ever wants to play support. Someone has to buy wards and courier, right?

I actually began playing support more because no one else would in my pub games. I started at about 3,000 MMR and am now at 3,700. I consider this a significant improvement on my end because it is likely that I have been stuck at around 3,000 MMR long before the ranked game mode was implemented. Probably since I started playing. So in the month or two I spent playing mostly the support role, I believe that I improved more than I did in over 2 years (maybe more) of playing Dota 2. Sure, your mechanical skills might improve but skills like game sense, positioning, and selflessness did not come easily to me when I played a core position.

HEROES

When picking good support heroes to include in this guide, I asked myself – what makes a support good? Beyond the obvious “buying courier and wards, pulling, stacking, ganking and harassing,” I believe that a big part of playing support in solo ranked is the ability to either create space, have impact, or stage comebacks even when behind. The idea here is that even if you’re playing Earthshaker and all you have is Arcane Boots and a wand, if you land your spells perfectly in a teamfight you can turn it around completely. So I present to you my list of good heroes to play when learning to support ranked games. The difficulty of these heroes does vary, so keep that in mind.

1. Earthshaker

I mentioned his positive aspects already. His fissure can stop aggression or make kills happen early on in the game. Echo slam is an extremely powerful ability when used correctly and can turn fights around in an instant. All you *really* need to have maximum impact is a blink dagger and arcane boots, but getting to those items can be difficult. Landing Fissures in the area you want and cutting off heroes from where they want to be is a little bit more difficult now due to the fact that you can no longer target the Fissure, but it should come with practice.

2. Sand King

I agonized over whether or not I should include Sand King in this list. He takes a lot to come online, and can be stopped almost completely early if he doesn’t get the experience and gold he needs. All it takes are a few wards in your jungle camps to totally mess up your groove. But, while Sand King is level and item dependent, he is still a support who can have massive impact on the game. Getting a Blink Dagger and a Smoke of Deceit at around the 11 minute mark and

going to gank will usually catch your opponent off guard and allow you to take an early fight as well as some objectives. Epicenter is also very potent in the mid to late game as you accrue items when combined with his almost-instant stun.

The biggest part of playing Sand King is getting levels early. You should be pulling camps every minute and sitting in fog next to your carry the rest of the time that you're not pulling, ready to stop any gank attempts but also to soak experience. As a melee hero, it is difficult to trade hits effectively with an enemy offlaner or tri-lane, so leave that to your other support or the carry himself.

3. Ancient Apparition

While he is incredibly squishy, Ancient Apparition is very flexible when it comes to skill builds and what he can accomplish. Generally I choose to get more points in Cold Feet or Chilling Touch, but that comes down to personal preference and the situation you have to deal with. The fact stands that at level 1, Chilling Touch gives you and all your buddies in the area 50 points of extra right click damage, which can get you a quick first blood.

When you hit level 6, your ultimate is off cooldown every 40 seconds, so use it. Even if you're just using it to get some last hits on a lane that no one else is farming, use it unless you anticipate that a fight will come that is more deserving of your icy balls. Aghanim's Scepter is pretty much core on AA, but it also helps to grab an Urn of Shadows early to provide some extra help for your team if no one else is getting it.

4. Disruptor

I don't see a whole lot of Disruptor in pubs or pro play anymore, which really bums me out. While he doesn't have a hard stun, his Glimpse ability is amazing. You should always max that first for the longer cast range and so you can have it off cooldown more often. If someone tries to teleport out, Glimpse disrupts the teleport if your team don't happen to have a stun handy. Just make sure that you count to 4 before using it if you want to bring someone back to a specific location instead of saving their life by accident.

While it is tempting to go for the immediate Aghanim's Scepter rush once you get your first few items, I would caution you against this. While an AOE doom is pretty awesome, I think that getting a mobility item first (such as a Blink Dagger or Force Staff) can actually be more useful than a Scepter because it allows you to increase the maximum distance at which you can cast Glimpse on someone – assuming that you have wards in that area to cast it on them. Taking a quick look at statistics from professional matches, it can be seen that the average-timed Blink

Dagger on Disruptor (29.74 minutes) has a greater winrate percentage (88%) than the average-timed Aghanim's Scepter (35.47 minutes with a 68% winrate)

5. Shadow Shaman

Shadow Shaman is excellent at most stages of the game as he has two disables, a great nuke that does damage to multiple targets to increase your flash farm capabilities, and his ultimate destroys towers. The only downside of playing him is that his base movespeed is very low and he falls into the category of a more passive support. Despite his low speed, he has great zoning capabilities in lane and can make kills happen from level one if you land a good duration Shackle (2.5 seconds of disable at level 1!)

As soon as you hit level 6 and get your ultimate, you should try to take a tower. If you want a good example from a pro player on how to play Shadow Shaman, I would suggest waytosexy, who played with Team Liquid at TI4. The goal is to try and get as much tower damage as possible on your own if you are unable to group up as 5 and take a fight. If you're ahead, you should use your ultimate to either take towers or an early Roshan. If you get jumped, resist the urge to panic ult without getting anything in return, because the cooldown on the wards is really long.

6. Skywrath Mage

I don't actually enjoy playing Skywrath a whole lot. I find him boring to play early as a support, but there is no denying that he is extremely effective at zoning enemy heroes out of lane with his Arcane Bolt spam and high base movement speed. Just make sure you bring a few clarities with you. When combined with other heroes that provide lockdown for an extended period of time, such as Faceless Void, Legion Commander, or Centaur Warruner, his ultimate can do insane damage. Also, his Ancient Seal is amazing. It's an instant silence that can keep heroes like Brewmaster or Tidehunter from using their ultimates and destroying your team provided that they don't have some kind of magic immunity to dispel it and that your reactions are quick enough.

My suggestion is if you are pushing into an area that you think might be high risk, and you know that the enemy team has an initiator with a blink dagger or some other form of mobility, have the Ancient Seal ability already selected. When a hero jumps in, you can immediately silence them without having to press the key beforehand. Dota 2 is a game of milliseconds, so be alert and prepared.

7. Dazzle

I consider Dazzle a great hero to play as a support in pubs. Not only can you use your heal and Shallow Grave to keep your teammates alive in situations where they would otherwise die immediately, you can also use your poison/slow to zone out enemy heroes and make kills happen with the help of your teammates. Also, his ultimate is severely underrated. I don't think people realize how huge an impact an AOE armor gain/reduction can have on a push or teamfight. Usually I buy a Medallion of Courage early with my boots to increase damage output and to take Roshan early. From there, he can be built pretty much any way you like.

8. Wraith King

The one true king, baby! Wraith King is an excellent hero for any player new to Dota 2, but I argue that he has a lot of value as a support. Of course, Wraith King has seen a lot of play in the professional scene and was first made popular as a support by Zai and PPD of Evil Geniuses. The logic behind picking him in a support role is that, unless he runs out of mana, Wraith King can tank as many spells and as much damage as he wants until he dies and then reincarnates with full health and mana. He is especially good against "one cycle" heroes who have one big spell that they use and then become less valuable in a fight.

When building Wraith King as a support, you should max your stun first. Then get a point in stats at levels 2 and 4 to help build your mana pool slightly. You should prioritize your Lifesteal Aura over critical strike because you won't have many items and as a result will not do very much damage. Get a Treads and a Magic Stick/Wand and use it if you need more mana to use your ultimate before you die. After this you can transition into something of a semi-carry and start doing more damage with your team.

9. Lion

ZZZZZAP! Lion is a pretty interesting hero. While similar in some respects to Lina, I think the similarities end at his ultimate, which is handy for bursting down important targets. He has a hex that's pretty *handy* as well as a targetable version of Nyx Assassin's impale. He can also drain mana at a pretty fast rate once it is upgraded to higher levels, making it handy against spell dependent heroes or ones with low mana pools.

If you want a good example of how to play Lion effectively, I would suggest MMY. Just focus on getting kills early if possible and getting your ultimate ready to use every time it's off cooldown.

10. Lich

Lich is awesome and fairly easy to play, even in a situation where you go to the offlane with another player. You should pretty much always skill sacrifice first because you can use it on your own creeps to deny the enemy heroes in the lane farm and experience. Using Sacrifice on your creeps also gives you and anyone else in the area experience as it dies, so your experience gain is sped up, making you more valuable while also negatively affecting the other team's farm.

Chain Frost, his ultimate, is also extremely powerful ever since it was buffed to have more maximum bounces. Use Chain Frost when the enemy team is bunched up together. Even if they are able to separate and stop the ice ball from bouncing, you have distracted them for a crucial period of time which you can use to pick them off while they are apart. What could be better than that? The answer to that question is INFINITE BOUNCES! If you're able to farm an Aghanim's Scepter your ultimate bounces forever so long as it has another target to bounce between.

11. Visage (warning: micro)

I think Visage plays in a similar style to Dazzle, minus the healing ability obviously. Your goal is to get boots, Medallion, and Summon Familiars and start going to work. Grave Chill and Soul Assumption are insanely good early against trilanes and offlane heroes if you have enough burst damage to build up the charges. From there you should try to rush an Aghanim's Scepter to increase your damage output AND for the extra stun you get from your familiar stomps.

As a side note: Familiars are not affected by Song of the Siren. Use this to your advantage if you are in a situation where you gank Naga Siren and she tries to teleport while using Song. The look on her face when your birds come crashing down will be priceless.

12. Enigma

Enigma is another one of those heroes that requires a lot to get going, but he farms the jungle so insanely fast giving him high impact in a game and he's quite easy to play, so I felt like I should include him. Because he makes quick work of the jungle, Enigma causes the GPM of your team to skyrocket significantly while still making use of every lane on the map. A mistake I see some players fall into often is the idea that they need a Blink Dagger quickly over everything else. Instead, I suggest this alternative: buy a Soul Ring (obviously), Mekanism, a Black King Bar, and then go for luxury items such as Blink Dagger. I don't really need to explain why the Mekanism is a good choice, but I think some people underestimate how good BKB is on him.

The power of Enigma is not just the Black Hole (which is awesome) - it's the threat of the Black Hole. If you are pushing into the enemy team's tier 2 or even tier 3 towers with a BKB you are

incredibly scary and difficult to initiate into because unless the other team has a hero with a disrupt that goes through magic immunity you have a guaranteed full duration Black Hole. Of course, a lot of the threat depends on how well you play the hero and position yourself, but the fact remains that if you land a good Black Hole with BKB on, it's very unlikely that you'll be brought out of it.

Besides that, his Malefice and Midnight Pulse are both very strong at pretty much every phase in the game. Eidolons never stop being great for farming, pushing, and defending, and there is always the threat of a comeback. Even in the most dire situations, I believe that a good Black Hole can bring a team back into the game. The challenge is landing good ones (and not cancelling them).

13. Enchantress (warning: micro)

Sproink! I love Enchantress. Behind her cheerful demeanor lurks a cold, hard killer. I prefer Enchantress to Chen any day of the week because her ability to take creeps at will is so much more useful for early aggression. Buy some clarities, tangoes, wards, courier, and a smoke, and you're good to go. The best creeps for getting early kills are, in my opinion, the Dark Troll Summoner and the Centaur Conqueror. If you want to harass an enemy out of lane while continuing to farm, the Harpy Stormcrafter and Wildwing Ripper are the best because the Harpy can spam Chain Lightning *forever* and the Wildwing's tornado is annoying as hell to stay in lane against. Grab some creeps, smoke up, get kills where you see an opening, and get an Urn to keep your teammates in fighting condition. If played correctly, Enchantress can win the early game for your team and put you in a position to snowball hard. She does take a lot of knowledge/intuition about when is a good time to gank for maximum chance of success.

It is important to note that your favorite support heroes all depend on what important to note that your favorite support heroes all depend on what *you* like to play and what you are good at. There is no rule for which supports you should play, so experiment. I am just making a case for why these heroes in particular are strong in this role.

COMMUNICATION

The degree to which you are able to communicate with your teammates might range anywhere from “not at all” to “perfectly”. It varies because people from all over the world play Dota, and we don’t all speak the same language. However, pretty much everyone understands some key phrases, such as “Roshan”, “push”, “def”, “kill”, and “help!” If you are playing with others who speak the same language as you, be kind. Even if you’re losing and they’re dying a lot, chewing them out won’t make things any better. You are a *support* and you should support your teammates in terms of morale as well as through your gameplay.

You should communicate to your teammates, through pings, keyphrases, or whatever it takes, when you are rotating for ganks, pulling, place wards, or need assistance. I should also mention that if you don’t have a microphone, you’re probably going to miss out. I find that the time it takes to type out instructions or desires in chat is time that could be used doing other things more quickly, or it just distracts me from where I’m going or what is on my map. Just don’t be *that guy* who talks WAY too much and becomes annoying. If you speak too much what you say starts to lose meaning and it becomes difficult to tell what is really important information.

Communicating is most important when you have another support working with you. Establish who should be focused on zoning out the enemy offlaner and who should be pulling to get farm and levels (assuming you are in a 3-versus-1 scenario). You should also talk to each other about who stuns first, which target needs to be focused, or just discuss what you think your next move should be. No one is capable of reading minds, so you have to say what’s on your mind.

PLAYSTYLES

The way in which you play as a support dictates the flow of the game, and should be coordinated with the hero you are playing as and whoever else might be on your team. For the sake of brevity, I will say that there are two main styles of support you can play - defensive and aggressive. Both of these styles have positives and negatives, but it varies on a game-to-game basis depending on your hero composition.

Defensive supporting is focused on getting farm for yourself to get a certain big item that allows you to do more for your team. Sand King is a good example of this. His Burrow Strike at level 1 is not very good as its range and damage don’t do much against heroes. My mentality as a Sand King is to stack camps, clear them with Sandstorm, and get a fast Blink Dagger. Going for ganks as Sand King at early levels accomplishes nothing because the chance of them succeeding is very low and he would be better off waiting for his ultimate and Blink Dagger to start being active. The downside to playing passively is that you essentially leave the other players on the map untouched (unless you have another support who allows you to play aggressively and gank

successfully), meaning that you are relying on your impact to exceed theirs once you get your items and levels.

Aggressive supporting is focused more on getting kills for your teammates and getting them to snowball by making a lot of rotations early and shutting down the other lanes. If I am playing as a support Vengeful Spirit, I would not play passively and focus on stacking and pulling because her stun/damage is quite good at level 1 and she does not need to stack and farm jungle camps to reach a big item. My goal as an aggressive support is to buy smokes, gank other lanes, and keep the offlaner down through either kills or zoning them out of experience range. This playstyle, if done correctly, is great for accelerating the support's experience gain while simultaneously keeping the other team's growth down. The downside of this style is that you risk failing your ganks for whatever reason and then falling behind the enemy team in experience.

GANKING

You can never really know when the perfect time to gank is. Any number of factors could cause your gank to fail; support rotations at an inopportune time may break your smoke, wards where you did not expect them and you either could not afford or did not have a smoke, etc. Failing a gank can seriously set you back in levels and farm, causing your team to fall behind. Regardless, there are a few rules for staging a successful gank:

- If the wave is pushed into your teammate's tower and the enemy player is too far forward, it is worth trying to get a kill or at least zoning him out so he cannot get experience.
- You can increase the likelihood of your ganks succeeding by de-warding the enemy team. This is why it pays to get to your jungle first and set up shop in a location where the enemy might move through to place a ward. Either you stop them from placing it at all, or you see where they place it and can immediately de-ward.
- Play mind games. Something I noticed from some pro players is that when they choose to go gank mid, for example, they will pull the wave and *then* use their Smoke and move towards wherever they want to gank. The enemy players in your lane might not call missing because they assume you are there pulling, and are therefore not a threat to any other lanes.
- Have patience. Don't force the issue if it doesn't look like your gank has a high percentage of succeeding. You could get yourself killed.
- Monitor the other team's supports. If you see that the enemy team ganked mid (regardless of whether or not they succeeded) you know their position. You can then get aggressive

on a hero in another lane because they most likely cannot receive backup from their own supports. Don't let your teammate's death be in vain!

All that said, some support heroes are just not good at ganking or putting out early game aggression. Know your hero's strengths and weaknesses and play around them.

STACKING AND PULLING

Stacking and pulling is often overlooked in pub games that I see (which might just be because I am relatively low in rank) and needs to be improved on. The main issue is timing.

For pulling the small camp on either safe lane to draw your creep wave into the jungle, the timing is generally around 12 seconds and 42 seconds of any minute. Some of the creep camps are weird and might not do what you want them to do. If you want to stack a camp, you should generally attack the camp at the 52 or 53 second point, and run out of the camp's spawn box area with the creeps following you. Most camps can be stacked like this numerous times, but be sure that you have someone on your team who can clear them effectively.

What you can do if you don't think you can get the creeps to pull is time the moment the neutral creep's auto-attack hits you with the moment that you are besides the creeps that spawned from your base. This will draw the aggro towards the neutral creeps, even if you can't see them in the jungle.

After the small camp has been pulled, you might realize that your creep wave will kill the neutral creeps before they themselves are killed. This happens pretty much every time unless you stacked the camp already before pulling it. In this case, if you are on the Radiant side you should eat one of the trees that is at the back of the small camp's neutral creeps' backs. By using timing or by judging the HP of the remaining neutral creeps in the small camp, you should attack the creeps in the medium camp and run into the area where the neutrals are fighting your friendly creeps. If timed properly, the new creeps should run in as your creeps finish off the remainder of the small camp. If the creeps are still alive after fighting the medium camp, you can pull the big creep camp from the left of that into the medium camp.

On the Dire side, creeps should be pulled from the leftmost big camp to the one to the right and above it. Again, use whatever you need to determine the timing. The best way to learn is to practice. If you feel that you are not able to successfully do a double pull, I believe it is better to use the extra time to stack the camp and then pull instead of causing the creeps to push into the enemy offlane tower and risk giving the offlaner precious experience.

TIMING - WHEN IS A GOOD TIME TO STACK AND PULL?

Know when it is a good time to stack or pull and when it is not. This can depend on numerous factors. Generally...

- Pull when the creep equilibrium is moving away from your tower and towards the enemy offlaner(s). You want to deny them as much experience as possible.
- Do NOT pull when the creep wave is close to your tower and the carry has creep equilibrium under control (for now) - you risk bringing the creeps under tower which makes them die faster, and pushes the wave toward the enemy offlaner.
- Do NOT pull if your carry is low on health, has no more health regeneration items, or is open to unnecessary harass or ganks by the enemy team.

Stacking camps depends as well. You should...

- Go to stack if you have another support teammate who can either zone the enemy hero out of lane or take over pulling responsibilities if the two overlap.
- NOT go to stack if there are heroes missing on the map and you suspect that they might be coming to gank your lane.

Of course, this all assumes that you are not a support who needs to stack camps for their own benefit. This assumes that you are playing a general support role.

TRILANE VS. TRILANE

Playing as a trilane against another trilane brings with it its own set of challenges. A lot of these are determined by player communication and ability to work together as a unit. In a public ranked game you may not have the ability to do this. But you can still try your best. Below I have compiled a list of goals you should try to accomplish in both defensive and aggressive trilane scenarios:

Defensive:

- Protect your carry and yourself in lane
- Protect your jungle early (before creeps spawn) to prevent the enemy from warding your camps

- Pull neutral camps to gain a slight XP advantage over the opposing triline
- De-ward any jungle camps that are blocked by the enemy

Basically your goal as a support in a defensive triline is to not die. Do anything you can to make the enemy's aggressive triline *not worth it*. Because they cannot stack/pull/kill neutral camps in the jungle, you have an innate advantage over them in gold and experience so long as you protect your jungle. This also means that the only way the other team can gain an advantage is to kill you and your teammates. Prevent this at all costs.

Aggressive:

- KILL, KILL, KILL!
- Deny their carry farm while giving your carry as much farm as possible
- Block jungle camps or contest pulls whenever they occur to gain experience or create a kill opportunity

In an aggressive triline scenario you are always at risk of falling behind. In a usual scenario, your two supports can stack and pull the jungle to get levels and farm while the carry free farms in lane, but now all three of you are splitting experience from one source: the lane. If you are unable to deny the enemy their jungle, without kills you will fall behind almost immediately and put your team at a disadvantage. The solution? MURDER THEM AND FEAST ON THEIR INNARDS FOR SUSTENANCE. An aggressive triline requires more coordination to quickly burst down targets one at a time, so doing this with random players might not be the best idea.

GETTING YOUR OWN ITEMS AND LEVELS

With all the emphasis on securing farm and space for your core teammates to farm, it can be easy to fall behind on items and levels as a support. Your worth as a support comes from how many spells you can get off during a teamfight, counter-initiating, and generally staying alive long enough to have maximum impact. If you haven't even hit level 6 by the time a teamfight breaks out at the 15 minute mark, you may have missed your opportunity to be relevant in the game at all. On the other hand, having a lot of farm for yourself at an early point in the game can throw off your opponents and accelerate your usefulness. The following tips can be used to increase your farm early to become relevant quicker:

- Gank early and often
- Take towers/push early with your team
- Take neutral stacks with your carry to soak experience and gain levels faster

- Stack and pull creep camps to your lane (discussed later)
- Make use of empty *safe* lanes to farm at low points in the game
 - Be ready to teleport to fights in other lanes should they occur and make yourself useful
 - Don't steal the lane from someone who needs the farm more than you do
 - Don't be an idiot and farm in a position where you do not have vision or can be easily ganked

As a support, your core players' success is your success because it allows you to snowball with them. If they have the items necessary to mount a push and take a tower, you get a reward when they do so. Free gold! When they are behind, you will need to dedicate more time to helping them come back from their deficit, leaving you out of luck when it comes to finding your own farm.

Depending on the hero you play in a game, your item choices will vary, but the common theme is utility and usefulness to your team early on, because that is usually when supports are strongest. Choose items that will make you more effective, like Mekanism, Force Staff, Blink Dagger, Urn of Shadows or a Medallion of Courage. However, some items like Aghanim's Scepter can have a huge impact on the game when picked up early on certain heroes. These include Visage and Ancient Apparition. Just be sure to pick up smaller items in between that allow your team to move forward, win fights, and take objectives. And obviously continue to buy wards, smokes, and detection as needed.

SECURING RUNES

Runes now spawn at both the top and bottom positions in the river every two minutes, starting from minute 0. You should go to secure them either for yourself or your mid if he needs to refill his bottle. These runes can also help you pull off ganks that wouldn't otherwise happen early on. If you can grab the Bounty rune for yourself (because no one else needs it or is able to) then it's even better because you get some sweet, sweet gold and experience.

POSITIONING AND WARDS

Getting into a good position at any point in a game is difficult. You have to be in a location that sets you up to have maximum impact with all of your spells. This means not getting caught out and blown up before the fight even starts, so it's best to stand back behind your teammates and far enough away from them that you don't get caught by accident when the enemy initiates.

Nothing is worse than being caught on the very edge of a Chronosphere or Reverse Polarity and being totally useless as your carry dies.

A second part of positioning is vision. Knowing where the enemy team is, and limiting their vision of where you are at any point in time puts you at a huge advantage. For this reason, it is important to know popular warding locations and putting Sentry Wards down there because often your opponents won't be very creative with their ward locations. The most common are on cliffs around the rune spawn points and at the entrance to either jungle. By limiting the vision of the other team and increasing your own in key locations you make it 10 times more difficult for them to position themselves well when you decide to take a fight.

One aspect of warding that is often overlooked is lane wards. Lane wards are wards placed in any lane (duh) that can see the area around the enemy tower, while still being out of range of the tower itself. This vision is useful because it allows you to spot teleport rotations where you would otherwise not. If your carry sees 3 people teleporting into the tower in his lane, he knows to stay back and hug his tower – or go somewhere else entirely – because they are trying to gank him. At the same time, because you know 3 players just teleported, you can get aggressive in another lane because they won't have any help.

Blocking and unblocking creep camps is also very important. Most people who are smart enough to buy wards are also smart enough to block camps, so it is important that you get into your jungle as soon as possible to prevent the enemy from blocking any of your camps with wards. If you can't do this for whatever reason, buy some sentries with your starting gold and wait for the camps to spawn at 30 seconds into the game, while making sure that you don't accidentally block any yourself. If you see that any camps did not spawn, you should put down a sentry within range of the camp but not within the 'box' that determines if creeps can spawn or not. Knowing where enemy wards are is something that comes with experience, [but there are images online with the boxes for each creep camp.](#)

There are times when you should probably make a voyage into the enemy's jungle or ancient spawn area as a team in the early phases of the game to block camps. This technique is very useful to prevent creeps from spawning and thus keeping certain heroes down. Chen, Enigma, Enchantress, jungling Doom, Sand King, and jungling Ursa all suffer when their camps are initially blocked. Tidehunter relies on using Ancient stacking and clearing with his Anchor Smash to catch up in farm if his offlane did not go well, so it is important that you block this camp and continue to block it as time passes. Sometimes supports might have the time to move into the jungle and stack camps for their carry or mid to clear later and accelerate their farm. If you know that the enemy carry can clear stacked camps quickly, it might be a good idea to go

and block their jungle camps to prevent them from getting ahead. Don't go into their jungle alone, though. That's just suicidal.

Speaking of suicidal, the cardinal rule you should always follow as a support when it comes to vision is never to walk uphill into an area where you have no vision. This is basically suicide. That is why it is very important to ward high ground locations, such as the area around Roshan or any entrance to either jungle.

Finally, if you get de-warded by the enemy team, don't go and put a ward back in the same spot. It's totally fine to use a sentry to deny them their own vision in that spot if they have it, but putting your ward down in the same spot guarantees that you will get de-warded again. This limits your vision and increases the chance that your team will fall victim to a potentially avoidable gank.

PLAYING WITH/AGAINST A GEM

Usually I only see people get gems when there is a pesky invisible hero they have to deal with. But, I think that if you have a sizeable lead, a Gem of True Sight is invaluable to any support. First of all, the 900g investment made on the Gem will pay off in the long run because you don't have to constantly spend 200g on more Sentry Wards. You are also able to limit any vision that the enemy team might still have, leaving them completely blind on the map. If they can't see you, and you're ahead, they don't feel safe. If they don't feel safe, they can't leave the base to get farm without knowing if they will be ganked or not. By buying a Gem you effectively starve them to death. Just take care not to lose it.

If the other team gets a Gem, or you just so happen to lose yours, don't panic. Warding against a Gem is difficult but possible. You need to get creative with your wards and put them in locations where they wouldn't normally think to look. These wards will not be as good as ones that you would place normally, but you need to take what you can get. A second important thing to note is that you should avoid placing wards on the ground if the enemy team has a Gem. When you put wards on the ground they're easy to spot as a hero walks from one location to another and take no effort to destroy. Make it difficult for them to take down your wards in any way you can.

SACRIFICING YOURSELF/CREATING SPACE

Sometimes you will have to be a bodyguard for your more important teammates. This all comes down to individual decisions made in a split second, so there isn't much that can be taught. Just be aware that you will have to die if it means your carry stays alive. Your deaths don't mean as much because you will usually have a lower respawn timer than anyone else and you don't have

as much tangible impact on the game as your carry might. However, keep in mind that feeding is still feeding.

There is a difference between creating space and feeding. The difference is what you get in return for your death and how much you personally lose, as well as what your team loses while the other team gains. It is possible to create space without dying, such as by farming/pushing an empty lane and forcing a rotation by the enemy team. Sometimes you will die. Actually, you will die a lot if you are playing from behind. Just make sure that you are still being useful to your team even if you die a lot. Stack camps, place wards, scout vision for you carry, and generally make yourself useful. Pay attention to the map and let your core players know what areas can be safely farmed.

TRADES

When you're behind or even with the enemy team, sometimes you will have to make trades. You can't have your cake and eat it too. Maybe your offlaner gets ganked by the enemy team and dies top, but you get a kill on their offlaner as well. The kill you got makes up slightly for the death of your teammate. Another common trade is letting the other team take a tower while your team claims Roshan and the Aegis. This is a calculation that you will have to make in the moment, although I would not say that multiple towers or a tier-3 tower is worth trading for Roshan. Roshan respawns, but your towers and map control will be gone forever.

This also factors into teamfights. If you are playing from behind and you take a teamfight where your team kills 2 enemy heroes and loses 3, you might consider it a loss. But, if you were able to kill a high priority hero with a lot of farm, and they only managed to kill a few relatively low priority heroes, that could be considered a win. Taking many fights like that can be key in staging a comeback, and it all depends on how you chain your spells and attacks.

PLAYING FROM BEHIND/LATE-GAME DECISION MAKING

This is another skill that cannot be taught. It comes with experience, and I cannot personally claim to be a master of this. I tend to err on the side of caution when it comes to making late game pushes, taking fights, and destroying objectives. If you are behind and you win one teamfight after playing from behind for a while, don't try to go for a game-ending push immediately. Recognize that you are still quite possibly behind in gold and experience by a large margin and use the time that the other team is still respawning to make small gains in vision and map control. You might have been trapped in your base for a while and as a result might not have

any vision at all. Use this time you have to get wards up in your jungle or in the lanes. By doing this your carry can farm relatively safely and gain items to assist you in the next fight.

If you have enough time, take Roshan. This depends entirely on your lineup and how much damage you can do in a short period of time. The same applies for taking towers. Part of your job as a support is to assess how much damage your team does and how long it will take based on that damage dealt to complete tasks. You should also try to estimate how fast the other team does those same things. How fast do they take Roshan? If you see them entering the Roshan pit you might estimate that you have enough time between then and the time they kill Roshan to run over and stage a fight to contest. If you know they will take it quickly, you might decide that it's better not to contest at all because you won't get there in time. Use the time to farm or prepare for an upcoming fight.

In a situation where there is a split pusher on the other team, or an all-out base race, it might be your job to teleport back and stop the push, or at the very least delay it. Your teammates can usually output more physical damage so they are required to push quickly, while your strength is in your ability to stun, reposition, or generally be a nuisance with your spells. Try to stop teleports, or even get kills, but obviously try not to get killed yourself.

Often when playing as a support we might overlook the importance of buyback (if it is even possible to afford it). Having buyback at crucial points in the late game can mean the difference between winning and losing. Some heroes benefit more from picking up the next item in their progression instead of saving for buyback, but I prefer to err on the side of caution and save just in case I die before I can use certain spells or if I still have more to contribute.

STAYING POSITIVE

Dota is frustrating. So, so, so frustrating. People make mistakes that can sometimes be easily avoided, and it's really tempting to let out that rage and call them out on their mistakes. Resist this urge. I understand if you have poor anger management skills, but take those frustrations out on a pillow or a stuffed animal. Raging and calling "GG" in all-chat doesn't get anything done, and it demoralizes you and your team. I know that if I decide in my head that a game is over, I check out and make it that much harder to stage a comeback. Remember, it ain't over til it's over!

The most important thing I have learned from supporting is that you need to stay optimistic and try to point out the positives in your lineup, while still trying your best. Your teammates will notice this attitude even if they don't speak your language, and hopefully they will follow suit.

There will be games that you lose because your mid player got mad at someone for whatever reason and started feeding intentionally, or you might just have a bad game. Whatever the reason, don't let it get you down. Dota 2 is all about learning and becoming a better player, so sit back and analyze your mistakes, your triumphs, what you could have done better, and what you did well.

Remember, the only common factor in every game you have played - win or lose - is you. You can always improve, but you can't force your random teammates to get better.

END

I hope this guide has been useful to you. Maybe you find that you would like to try playing support more often in pubs, or maybe you'd rather stick with what you're doing now. Maybe you already play support regularly and you know all this stuff. If you do, by all means please let me know and contribute some information that could help others. I am only one man, and I'm honestly not amazing at Dota. This is not objective fact, but my opinions based on how I see and play the game.

Thank you for reading. **GLHF**.